



[homepage](#) > [Lectures](#) > **Mark Janse**

**May 13, 2008**

**Mark Janse**

On May, 13 2008, the Onassis Foundation Scholars' Association organized a lecture by Mark Janse Research Professor in Ancient and Asia Minor Greek Ghent University, Belgium. «**The Resurrection of Cappadocian**» (**Asia Minor Greek**) at Cotsen Hall.



### **The Resurrection of Cappadocian (Asia Minor Greek)**

Cappadocia is the name of the ancient region in Asia Minor, which originally included Pontus as well. The geographer Strabo, born in Amaseia, says the Cappadocians and Pontians were *ὁμόγλωττοι* (1.2.1). Unfortunately, we do not know what the ancient Cappadocian language was like. Basil of Caesarea, a native speaker, affirms that it wasn't Greek. A possible clue can be found in Herodotus, who says the Cappadocians are called Σύροι by the Greeks, but Καππαδόκες by the Persians (7.72). Elsewhere, he calls them Σύροι Καππαδόκαι (1.72). According to Strabo, these "Cappadocian Syrians" were also called Λευκόσυροι, to distinguish them from the "Dark Syrians" who lived "outside the Taurus" (12.3.9). It is very likely that the Cappadocian "White Syrians" were in fact descendants of the Hittites, who dominated Asia Minor and Syria from their capital Hattusa in Cappadocia from 1700-1200 BC. The last Hittite documents are in fact from Syria, which explains why the Hittites are frequently mentioned among the pre-exilic peoples of Canaan in the Torah (especially in Exodus). If, then, the ancient Cappadocians were descendants of the Hittites, it stands to reason to assume that their language must also have been related to Hittite.

After the fall of the Hittite Empire, Cappadocia was invaded successively by Phrygians, Cimmerians and Medes, before it became a Persian satrapy, called Katpatuka in the so-called Behistun inscription of king Darius I (522-486 BC). The last satrap was Ariarathes, who refused to submit to Alexander the Great and was proclaimed king of Cappadocia in 332. The Ariarathids, even though of Persian descent (aria- means "Aryan", i.e.



*Mark Janse gave his lecture at Cotsen Hall of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens*

"Persian"), were professed philhellenes, as appears from their surnames. Ariarathes V (163-130 BC), surnamed Εὐσεβὴς Φιλοπάτωρ, was particularly important in the hellenization of Cappadocia. This process was reinforced after the Roman annexation in 17 AD by the emperor Tiberius, who rebaptized its capital Mazaca (a Persian name) as Καισάρεια. According to Strabo, many indigenous peoples of Asia Minor had already lost their native languages as well as their native names in his days (12.4.6). The Jews of the diaspora had long before been hellenized. The Torah was translated into Greek by the Seventy in the third century BC for the sake of the Alexandrian Jews and the apostolic epistles were all written in Greek, including the first epistle of

Peter which was addressed to the “diaspora of Cappadocia” (1 Peter 1.1).



*Elevres gorge and Holy Cross chapel in Cappadocia*

According to the Latin Church Father Jerome, the entire East spoke Greek by 400 AD. But even the Cappadocian Church Fathers, who wrote an impeccable Greek, admit that they were bilingual. As in every case of language contact, the mother tongue leaves its traces on the second language.

The Cappadocians were notorious βαρβαρόφωνοι, a term used to refer to people who “speak bad Greek” according to Strabo (14.2.8). This harsh and rustic accent must have been particularly distinctive and a serious disadvantage for orators of Cappadocian origin, witness the following epigram attributed to Lucian (Anthologia Palatina 11.436):

θᾶπτον ἔην λευκοὺς κόρακας πτηνάς τε χελώνας  
εὐρεῖν ἢ δόκιμον ῥήτορα Καππαδόκην.

One such orator was Pausanias of Caesarea, a student of Herodes Atticus, of whom Flavius Philostratus said:

ἀπήγγειλε παχεία τῇ γλώττῃ καὶ ὥς Καππαδόκαις ξύνηθες, ξυγκρούων μὲν τὰ ξύμφωνα τῶν στοιχείων, συστέλλων δὲ τὰ μηκυνόμενα καὶ μηκύνων τὰ βραχεία (Lives of the Sophists 2.13).

Cappadocian Greek may have sounded harsh and rustic in the first centuries AD, it was nothing compared to what happened to the language after the Seljuk invasions in the 11th and 12th c. and the Ottoman invasions in the 14th and 15th c. From the 12th c. onwards, Cappadocia is practically cut off from the rest of the Greek-speaking world and subject to a continuous process of language contact, bilingualism, code-mixing and language death. The impact of the Turkish language on the Greek-speaking communities of Cappadocia is disastrous and the process of hellenization started in the 3rd c. BC is now completely reversed by a process of turkicization. In a Latin document written in 1437, sixteen years before the fall of Constantinople, we read how in many parts of Asia Minor, Turkish was being used instead of Greek in church as the language of communication. Sermons were preached in Turkish and Greek was used exclusively for liturgical purposes, viz. singing the Mass (i.e., the Psalms) and quoting the Gospels and

Epistles (Νέος Ἑλληνομνήμων 7 (1910), p. 366).

At the beginning of the 20th c., there were only twenty Greek-speaking communities left in Cappadocia, all of them bilingual. When Oxford professor Richard Dawkins, the first and last linguist to do fieldwork in Cappadocia, visited these communities around 1910, he realized that almost all of the Cappadocian dialects were on the verge of extinction, giving way to Turkish, which had replaced Greek as the language of everyday communication, even in entirely Christian villages such as Misti and Axo. What was left of the original Cappadocian Greek had changed significantly due to the massive borrowing of sounds, vocabulary and grammatical structures from Turkish. Dawkins described the state of Cappadocian Greek as follows:

“The Turkish has replaced the Greek spirit; the body has remained Greek, but the soul has become Turkish” (Modern Greek in Asia Minor, p. 198). An example of Cappadocian Greek is the following text from Ferteke recorded around 1900 by the German linguist Albert Thumb (Handbuch der neugriechischen Volkssprache, p. 297f.):

ένα καλό κύριο άτρωπος έν.-ν.ε βαρύ αστενάο. τσίγούρτσε το ν.αίκατ, και ν.αίκατ ακόμ ήτον τελ.ίγανλ.ϊ, και είπεν το: σεβγίλ.ιμ, τρανάς το, ήλτε το σαχάτιμ. έσεται χωρίς και χωρίς να σ' αφήσω και να πάγω. ακόμ τελ.ίγανλ.ϊ 'σαι, και αν κρέβεις να χατώ ραχάτ, να με πκείς ένα καλό.

χωρίς άλλο να παντρεφτείς, ξέβρω το. πολ.ύ σε γιαλβαρτώ, το κομσούμ μή το πάρεις, ογώ μετ' εκείνο γαβγάλ.ι'μαι. άνδον με κανδίεις, τότε νά το πάρεις δέ ν.αι, να μή χατώ μεραγλ.ις. και το ν.αίκα έδεκε κασϊλ.ικ και είπε: ήιτς τα σόν το χάτσϊμος ογώ μαν.ί μή 'νω ραχάτ ραχάτ χάτ, άς σε πώ το ορτάτατ. ζάτι εκείνο ογώ νά το πάρω δέ ν.αι, τσούνκι ογώ από τρία μήν.ες όμβρο σ' ένα πασκά άτρωπο έδωκα τσόάπ τον.



*Yeni Mahalas district of Sinasos*

“A good gentleman fell seriously ill. He called his wife, and his wife was still young, and he told her: “My love, you see it, my hour has come, it is coming inevitably for me to leave you and to go. You are still young, and if you want me do die peacefully, do me a favour. You will (re)marry for sure, I know that. I beg you, please, don't take my neighbour. I am angry with him. If you are content with me, then don't take him, that I may not die anxiously.” And the woman gave answer and said: “Don't let me be a source for concern at your death at all. Die in peace, I will tell you the truth: That man I will not take him in any case, because three months ago I have given my word to another man.”



*Top: Saint Nicholas monastery's rocky landscape  
Bottom: East side of Gorgoli rocks with its Byzantine churches*

This text illustrates the intensive language contact between Greek and Turkish, as Cappadocian is a truly mixed language, the result of what linguists call code-mixing. This code-mixing reflects the cultural symbiosis between Christians and Muslims, which is confirmed by many personal testimonies from Cappadocian refugees collected in the imposing series *Η Έξοδος*, published by the Κέντρο Μικρασιατικών Σπουδών:

The Cappadocians were dispersed all over the Greek fatherland, a new Cappadocian diaspora. A number of homogeneous communities were settled in Macedonia, which had been only recently, after the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, been ceded by the Ottomans.

The majority of the Cappadocians were monolingual Turkish-speaking, the minority bilingual Cappadocian-Turkish. Cappadocian must have sounded as Turkish as it sounded Greek, witness the following description by the well-known Greek dialectologist Nikolaos Kontosopoulos:

Όποιος ακούει – ή μάλλον διαβάζει, γιατί σήμερα δεν μιλιούνται πια τα ιδιώματα αυτά, αφού όλοι σχεδόν οι φορείς τους, πρόσφυγες του 1922, έχουν πεθάνει – την καππαδοκική διάλεκτο, δεν ξέρει αν έχει να κάνει με τούρκικα σε ελληνικό στόμα ή με ελληνικά σε τούρκικο στόμα (&ιάλεκτοι και ιδιώματα της νέας ελληνικής, σ. 7).

The refugees were not well received in their new homeland. Their mother tongue, whether Turkish or Cappadocian, will have been one of many reasons. The Ανταλλαγή turned out to be a καταστροφή for Cappadocian as well as other Asia Minor refugees: The difficult process of acculturation, combined with feelings of discrimination and even repression, resulted in an acceleration of the process of language attrition and language death which had started a long time ago. Collaborators of the Κέντρο Μικρασιατικών Σπουδών in Athens who interviewed native speakers in the 1940s and 1950s in an ultimate attempt to record some of the Cappadocian dialects while they were still spoken, unanimously lament the fact that even the elder people were gradually forgetting their mother tongue and refused to transmit it to their children and grandchildren. Thanasis Kostakis, one of the most prolific scholars in the field of Asia Minor Greek dialectology and ethnology, conducted fieldwork in the 1960s in Mistiot Cappadocian communities in Thessaly and Macedonia. When his book was finally published in 1977, the list of his informants contained mainly deceased and very old people.

Thus the voices of the Cappadocian people gradually vanished, until they were officially declared dead, not just in Greek sources, but also in other authoritative scholarly references like Ethnologue and the Linguist List. My own work on Cappadocian started as a spinoff of my PhD research on the evolution of word order in the history of the Greek language. When I was commissioned by Prof. Chr. Tzitzilis of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki to contribute the chapter on Cappadocian to his monumental handbook of Modern Greek dialects, I was convinced that I was working on another dead language which, as a philologist, I was used to doing. A preliminary draft of the chapter, which I actually considered to be the prefinal version, was finished in 2004. In May 2005, my friend and colleague Dr Dimitris Papazachariou of the University of Patras sent me a DVD with recordings from the village of Σήμαντρα in Macedonia. Σήμαντρα is the Greek name of the Cappadocian village of Semendere whose dialect was considered to be the most “corrupt” (i.e., turkicized) of all by Dawkins. The language of the recordings was Greek, with a Northern accent, interspersed with Turkish whenever the speakers didn’t want my colleague to listen in. Then, all of sudden, one of the speakers uttered four words, a minimal sentence, in Cappadocian:

πατέραμ δώεκα φσέα έπκι “ο πατέρας μου έκανε δώδεκα παιδιά”

The utterance was authentic Simandriotika in every respect, except for the word πατέρα(ς), which is κοινή δημοτική - the Cappadocian word being βαβά(ς). During preliminary fieldwork in Thessaly in June 2005, we discovered to our great and pleasant surprise that there are in fact still speakers of Cappadocian left, not just very old people, but second- and third-generation speakers, including young middle-agers.

*All pictures of Cappadocia are taken from Evangelia Balta's book Sinasos, Pictures and Narrations (Athens, Asia Minor Studies Centre, 2004)*

- top of page -

Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation | Tel. +30 210 3713000 | Fax. +30 210 3713013 | Email: [pubrel@onassis.gr](mailto:pubrel@onassis.gr)